DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 041 UD 032 285

AUTHOR Pozmantier, Janet
TITLE Primary Prevention: Teaching Children Today the Parenting Skills They Will Need Tomorrow.
PUB DATE 1996-12-00
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum; Disadvantaged Youth; *Discipline; Elementary School Students; Elementary Secondary Education; *Mental Health; Minority Groups; Parent Education; *Parenting Skills; Secondary School Students; *Self Esteem; Urban Schools; Urban Youth
IDENTIFIERS *Primary Prevention

ABSTRACT

"Primary Prevention: Promoting Mental Health in the Next Generation" is a curriculum that teaches children about the relationship between parenting practices and a child's mental health. Essentially, the program teaches children today about the parenting skills they will need in the future. This report describes the curriculum and reports on an evaluation of its effectiveness. The primary goal is to prevent and reduce mental health problems in the next generation of children. The program is composed of three developmentally appropriate curricula, for kindergarten through grade 3, grades 4 through 6, and grades 7 through 12. Each curriculum is divided into a leader's guide and units on: (1) building a foundation for mental health; (2) self-esteem; (3) raising children; and (4) solving problems and getting help. The curriculum has been implemented in the Houston (Texas) Independent School District, the fifth largest city school district in the United States. Over 9,000 students have participated. In 1994-95, in an outcome evaluation study, pre-, post-, and followup questionnaires were administered to 340 students in grades 4 through 6 and 350 in grades 7 through 12. Roughly half of the students were Hispanic Americans, with 41% Black at the elementary level and 26% Black at the upper levels. Approximately 76% of the elementary school students were eligible for free lunches. Students were able to identify parenting styles, positive discipline techniques, and techniques that would improve self-esteem. Younger children became more likely to reject corporal punishment, and they learned that the way parents treat children affects their self-esteem. A second study, in 1996, found similar gains in knowledge for 263 elementary school students, and a parenting attitudes questionnaire completed by 82 program instructors before and after instructor training found positive attitude changes for instructors as well. The curriculum is being translated into Spanish for a culturally responsive version. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 419 041

PRIMARY PREVENTION: TEACHING CHILDREN *TODAY* THE PARENTING SKILLS THEY WILL NEED *TOMORROW*

Janet Pozmantier, Program Director
Houston Advocates for Mental Health in Children
6209 Skyline
Houston, Texas 77057
713-783-8470
713-783-8858 (fax)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Janet Pozmantier

UD032255

PRIMARY PREVENTION: TEACHING CHILDREN *TODAY* THE PARENTING SKILLS THEY WILL NEED *TOMORROW*

Whether children grow up to be happy, well-adjusted and productive citizens depends largely on their upbringing. Some children are fortunate and receive nurturing, respect, and appropriate discipline. Far too often, however, parents do not have the training or skills to meet their children's needs. Research has shown that ineffective parenting is an important contributing factor to many social and health problems, among them:

- substance abusing children
- delinquency and crime
- abused and neglected children
- poor academic performance
- poor social and school adjustment
- emotional disturbance.

In other words, violence, crime, addictions, etc. are *symptoms*; unhealthy parenting is a *root cause*.

Treatment services, while critical, are often ineffective in permanently altering parental behaviors. Waiting until people become parents is often too late. Influenced by their own negative experiences as recipients of poor parenting, many will unconsciously repeat the same behaviors with their children. Buying into the "mistaken and highly dangerous assumption that good child-rearing is instinctive" (Miedzian, 1993), most parents do not participate in classes. Ultimately, those who do eventually attend parenting classes often believe they have failed in achieving what should "come naturally."

According to the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse, prevention programs targeted at parents before they become abusive or neglectful reduce the likelihood for future maltreatment. The term "primary prevention" means stopping something before it ever starts. ***If we can stop abusive, destructive parenting practices from occurring in today's future parents, perhaps we can reap the benefits of more mentally healthy generations tomorrow.***

This is why *Primary Prevention: Promoting Mental Health in the Next Generation* was created. *Primary Prevention* is a curriculum that teaches children about the relationship between parenting practices and a child's mental health. Essentially, the program teaches children TODAY the parenting skills they will need TOMORROW.

But why teach *children* parenting skills? Because the elements of good parenting require self-esteem, healthy relationships, knowledge of child development, and skills in positive discipline techniques, the foundation for such learning should begin many years prior to becoming a parent. Prepared with information, skills, and positive experiences, the parents of tomorrow have a much greater chance of parenting their children in mentally healthy ways. And children who are mentally healthy become productive, successful adults.

PURPOSE AND GOALS

The primary goal of *Primary Prevention: Promoting Mental Health in the Next Generation* is to prevent and reduce mental health problems in the next generation of children.

The *Primary Prevention Program* has been designed to achieve the following results:

1) To improve students' knowledge of parenting responsibilities, demands, and costs.

2) To improve students' knowledge of and dispel myths about child development.

3) To increase students' understanding of the relationship between parenting practices and self-esteem.

4) To enhance students' understanding of the importance of self-esteem to mental well-being.

5) To increase students' knowledge of positive discipline techniques.

6) To enhance students' knowledge of and access to mental health treatment services.

PROGRAM CURRICULUM

Primary Prevention: Promoting Mental Health in the Next Generation is composed of three developmentally appropriate curricula:

- Level I: Kindergarten - third grade
- Level II: 4-6th grade
- Level III: 7-12th grade.

Each curriculum is divided into 5 segments:

- Leader's Guide
- Unit I: Building a Foundation for Mental Health
- Unit II: Self-Esteem
- Unit III: Raising Children
- Unit IV: Solving Problems and Getting Help.

Within the units are lessons pertaining to issues of parenting styles, realities of raising children, parenting myths, child development, positive discipline techniques, emotional abuse, and mental health. The program utilizes a variety of methods -- group discussion, role plays, videos, in-class activities, and homework assignments -- to involve students in the learning process.

The *Primary Prevention* curriculum is a self-contained program. It is designed to enable a teacher, counselor, nurse, volunteer, or other professional working with children to administer the curriculum in eleven to thirteen sessions of 45 to 60 minutes. The sessions are given consecutively and in sequence.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

With support from the Ima Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, *Primary Prevention* was created by Houston Advocates for Mental Health in Children (HAMIC) in 1991-92. The Houston Independent School District (HISD) Board of Trustees approved the program in 1991, and HAMIC entered into a cooperative agreement with HISD to operate the program within the district.

HISD is the fifth largest school district in the nation with an enrollment of more than 200,000 students. The district is primarily minority, and serves children of all socioeconomic status in urban, inner city, and suburban areas. Over 9,000 HISD students have participated in the *Primary Prevention Program*.

The program has also been implemented in other settings, such as preschools, teenage pregnancy centers, family involvement projects, juvenile delinquency centers, psychiatric hospitals, as well as several school districts outside of the Houston area.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

In 1994-95, an outcome evaluation study of the *Primary Prevention Program* was undertaken to determine whether children's knowledge and attitudes about parenting can be altered. Pre-, post- and follow-up questionnaires were administered to 340 4-6th grade and 350 7-12th grade students in a major metropolitan school district. The same questionnaire was administered during each testing session and was divided into two parts: knowledge acquisition and attitude toward discipline.

Ethnic breakdown for the 4-6th grade population was 54% Hispanic, 41% Black, 4% White, and 1% Other. The students' average percentile ranks (compared to the Texas state average of 50) were 38 and 42 for Reading and Math, respectively. Approximately 76% were eligible for the state's free lunch program.

Ethnic breakdown for the 7-12th grade population was 52% Hispanic, 26% Black, 20% White, and 2% Other. The students' average percentile ranks (compared to the Texas state average of 50) were 43 and 44 for Reading and Math, respectively.

After controlling for pretest scores, academic achievement scores, age, and socioeconomic status, results demonstrated significant knowledge gains at posttest for both the 4-6th grade and 7-12th grade students and at two month follow-up for the 4-6th grade participants.

Children were able to identify parenting styles, positive discipline techniques, and the techniques that would likely improve self-esteem. Younger children's attitudes about the use of corporal punishment significantly changed in a positive direction (i.e., there was greater rejection of this method as a means of disciplining children), and they learned that the way parents raise their children affects children's self-esteem.

A second study evaluating the effectiveness of the Kindergarten - third grade curriculum was completed in 1996. Post-test and follow-up questionnaires were administered to 263 students at public elementary schools in the greater Houston area. Ethnic breakdown included 51% Black, 37% Hispanic, 10% White, and 3% Other. Twenty-six percent were kindergartners, 21% first graders, 30% second graders, and 22% third graders. Approximately 72% were eligible for the state's free lunch program.

After controlling for age, grade, and socioeconomic status, results demonstrated significant knowledge gains and attitude changes at post-test and follow-up. Children in this age group were clearly receptive to the information presented. The program was effective in teaching the students about positive parenting practices and the relationship between parenting practices and children's self-esteem. As a result of participating in the program, students held less favorable attitudes toward the use of corporal punishment as a discipline technique at post and follow-up testing.

In the second study, a parenting attitudes questionnaire was also administered to 82 program instructors prior to and after instructor training. Results showed that trainees endorsed more nonabusive attitudes post-training, indicating the training was successful in changing parenting attitudes while teaching positive parenting concepts.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The *Primary Prevention Program* was developed by adult and child participants representing a variety of multicultural backgrounds. Outcome evaluations demonstrate the program's effectiveness in reaching children of all ages, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement levels.

More work has to be done, however, to impact older students and teens. Although students this age gained significant increases in knowledge, their attitudes toward physical methods of discipline did not markedly change. In an effort to address this situation, the 7-12th grade curriculum was recently revised and will be re-evaluated this Spring.

Because parenting often reflects cultural attitudes and beliefs, the *Primary Prevention Program* is currently being translated into Spanish. This culturally appropriate adaptation will meet the needs of the rapidly growing U.S. Spanish-speaking population.

For more information about the *Primary Prevention Program*, contact Janet Pozmantier, M.S., Houston Advocates for Mental Health in Children, 6209 Skyline, Houston, Texas 77057, 713/783-8470.

REFERENCES

Miedzian, M. Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence. Doubleday: New York, 1993, p. 116.

National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse: cited in *Children's Trust Fund of Texas*, Number 15, Winter, 1991, p.7.